

## **Pilot Project Profile: Lamoille North Supervisory Union**

Lamoille North Supervisory Union has been a pilot project since January 2002. From the beginning, the district engaged the K-12 system, current students and youth who had dropped out, the school board, community members, and social service partners in examining the conditions that were contributing to their high dropout rate. Looking at the students in the cohort data (2000 and 2001 graduation years) school officials recognized that most of the students who dropped out had been homeless at the time they left school and were experiencing multiple personal/social problems. They also found that most of the students were trying to continue their education, primarily using adult basic education services. The students wanted to earn a high school diploma but needed to work or needed time to deal with personal concerns. Attending school full-time or during the regular school day was not feasible, at least in the short term. With the conditions better understood, the supervisory union entered into articulation agreements with Vermont Adult Basic Education and Vermont Jobs Corps that enabled students to earn a LUHS diploma. As a result, there were only 17 dropouts in the 2002-03 school year compared with an average of 37 for several years prior. Also, 10 students returned to school to due to the opportunities offered through the new articulation agreements.

The school also examined and changed policies and procedures related to substance abuse and discipline. The entire school staff and faculty received training in “No Disposable Kids” in August 2003. An immediate impact of these efforts is a reduction in fights in the 2003-04 school year – none as of December!

This fall, LUHS started an in-house alternative program, called the Access Program. Students who are struggling academically and whose behavior is disruptive participate in a credit-bearing class that focuses on social skills development and in a structured study hall each day. Most of these students receive services from the school’s guidance department and outside agencies. The program’s lead teacher and instructional aide are paid through the district’s Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant.

The second year of funding focused planning on required community service for suspended and expelled students, and students at risk of those disciplinary actions. LUHS has created a continuum of disciplinary intervention with appropriate community service options that will be implemented in the 2003-04 school year. The continuum includes:

- De-escalation and mediation at the time of a problem (all staff being trained before the school year begins);
- The planning room, called the Opportunity Room, will include mediation and exploration of interests that could be pursued through community service or school to work;
- After school detention will include further exploration into the reasons behind the problems the student is facing in school and a determination of whether community service would be appropriate as part of a response;
- Repeated in-school detentions may result in referral to the school’s Access Program
- Out-of-school suspension may include community service as a condition to return to school;
- Long term suspension will involve referral to Adult Basic Education that includes five hours of community service as part of that pathway to a LUHS diploma.

In addition to the changes in the disciplinary program, community service will be woven into all 9<sup>th</sup> grade advisories. The advisories meet 45 minutes each day and were created in response to concerns about the transition between middle and high school.